

VZCZCXRO8843  
PP RUEHROV  
DE RUEHTU #0761 2861725  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
P 131725Z OCT 09  
FM AMEMBASSY TUNIS  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6880  
INFO RUEHXX/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L TUNIS 000761

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/13/2019  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [MEPP](#) [TS](#)  
SUBJECT: TUNISIA: SENIOR BEN ALI ADVISOR ON MIDDLE EAST  
PEACE PROCESS

REF: TUNIS 732

Classified by Ambassador Gordon Gray for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) During an October 8 introductory call, the Ambassador pressed Minister of State Abdelaziz Ben Dhia, a senior advisor and gatekeeper to President Ben Ali, for a more active Tunisian role in advancing the Middle East peace process. Ben Dhia stressed the Tunisian Government's commitment to a diplomatic solution: "Both sides must make a strong effort." At the same time, Ben Dhia conceded that the GOT had doubts about Israel's good faith: "They keep saying no," adding that he believed this perception of Israeli intransigence was undermining Palestinian confidence in the entire process. Ben Dhia asserted that Tunisia did press the Palestinian authority to take constructive steps, but offered no specifics.

¶2. (C) The Ambassador told Ben Dhia that Washington believed countries like Tunisia had a very important role to play in helping to create an environment conducive to progress on the main track. Specifically, the U.S. would like to see Tunisia reestablish a diplomatic presence in Tel Aviv and allow Israel to reestablish a presence in Tunis. Ben Dhia reaffirmed that Tunisia believed the process was currently stuck at an impasse. If there was real progress (read "concessions" from the Israeli side), President Ben Ali would consider reestablishing some level of diplomatic ties with Israel.

¶3. (C) Comment: As discussed reftel, we believe Tunisia is willing and able to take a more active supporting role in the peace process, but it will not take the lead in doing so. It will instead seek diplomatic cover, most probably by taking steps in concert with other moderate Arab states. End comment.

GRAY